

Complete Guide to Managing E-Ballots During a Tournament

The use e-ballots has two benefits. It is convenient for the judges, who no longer have to pick up a paper ballot and, after the round, deliver it back or find a runner to do the same. And it saves an enormous amount of time in a tournament overall. The general estimate is a saving of one half hour *per round*. You can see how this adds up overall.

Going to e-ballots can be a major event for a tournament. There will inevitably be growing pains. But as more and more tournaments go digital, it will get easier for everyone.

These instructions should help you from start to finish through the tournament. They are applicable to both small tournaments in a reasonably manageable venue and large tournaments spread out over a vast college campus. And they have repeatedly proven effective in LD, PF and Policy, for novice divisions through varsity. You may be able to improve on them; if so, do so. But we do not advise ignoring any of them. Keep in mind that the judge pools, especially in PF, are a moving target, with new people coming in at virtually every tournament. They will always need guidance. These instructions give you the means to provide that guidance.

In advance:

Set the following rule: all ballots will be electronic, with no exceptions. **Include that in your invitation.** The thing is, a partially electronic system isn't terribly better than a non-electronic system. Printing up ballots, even for just a small handful of luddites, still requires printing up ballots, distributing and retrieving them. All your time savings go down the drain.

Make sure that there are solid fines in place for missing rounds, and make sure that the team's coach is notified whenever a fine is levied. (There's a box to click on the fines page in tabroom.) This will guarantee responses from the teams affected.

A few days before the tournament, after all your entries and judges are set, and before you open prefs/strikes (if any), send out a message to all coaches reminding them to make sure all their judges (and, for that matter, students) are linked to tabroom. We suggest including language like that posted at the end of this guide.*

At the tournament:

The biggest issues at a tournament are lingering luddites who still need to be linked, judges who press start (sometimes even for both flights) the moment they get the notification as compared to when the round actually starts, judges who don't press start when the round does start, and judges who don't enter results in a timely manner. There are other issues, but these are the big ones.

When you do the pairing, you will see any luddites on the schematic; they're marked with a little L. Before issuing the pairing, replace and fine the luddites. This will alert the schools that there is a problem, and they will shortly come into tab, and you can explain that judges must be linked, and you can, at that point, link them. And remove the fine, because you've made your point.

Once a pairing is set, publish it on the web and blast it. **We recommend allowing half an hour from blast to start time.** Half an hour has proven workable over many tournaments. More is unnecessary, and less is unwieldy. Give people half an hour, and they will use it and then, more than likely, start the round.

The there is the poke:

- Using the Blast Message Only field, send a 10-minute warning before the round to all unstarted rounds, telling them that it is, indeed, the 10-minute warning. Specify flight 1, if that is appropriate.
- Using the same field, blast a "start now" message at the literal start time. You will see start times appearing on the schematic as rounds start. Poke individual judges whose rounds haven't started 5 minutes after start time, using the blast message ability to that round only, and to that judge only. Begin with pokes and escalate to phone calls. We recommend pulling a list of the judges (use the csv option on the judge page) for a handy guide to all their phone numbers, although this information is also on their judge page in tabroom. (Our theory is that the last thing a judge wants is the tab room calling them and asking them what the hell is going on. As the fact that such calls are possible starts entering into the mindset of the activity, judges are going to start getting the message that they need to do their jobs in a professional fashion or else get challenged on it. Who needs that annoyance?)
- If judges are absent or unresponsive, find new ones and reblast. We like to include both the new and replaced judge names in the blast, so everyone knows what's what.
- If students are absent, forfeit them. There is no excuse for not being on time for a round for which you have had a half-hour warning. We usually give them no more than 10 minutes for a flight 1 and 5 minutes for a flight 2.
- Send a 10-minute warning toward the end of the round to judges who have not entered decisions.
- Escalate from pokes to calls of judges running seriously late, usually the last two or three unentered ballots.
- If rounds are flighted, at the appropriate time send a message to all unstarted rounds to start now.

It works. Although we strongly recommend at least one tournament staffer (in each building, if you have multiple venues) as boots on the ground to report problems to tab, such as when judges don't respond and the like.

You might think that this ends the need for humans in the tab room, except that the chasing down of unstarted rounds, or rounds that haven't started but the judge says they've started (like the schmegeggy who press start at the same time for both flights fifteen minutes before flight 1) has not ended. Subbing in and forfeiting student no-shows and unforfeiting student no-shows is an issue. Customer service is an issue. (Kaz answers the phone like she works for a spa—"This is Kaz in tab. How can I help you?"—whereas I just grunt out the word "Tab!" Same effect.)

The key here is, keep people alert to making the tournament run on time, and start calling people when things go awry. You have all their numbers in tabroom. If you're using a system that enables long-distance tournaments, use your phone, the device that eliminates long distances. Do you really care if you annoy a judge too dumb/obdurate/befuddled to click the start button or call you up when a student doesn't show (after you've given out your number a hundred times)? Tab's job includes keeping the trains running on time. Feel free to put on your police hat to make it so, if that's what it takes.

By the way, as a tournament progresses, problems tend to diminish. Keep posting the start warnings and the like, but once you get into elims, most people are just as anxious to get the thing over with as you are, and cooperation will be virtually a hundred percent.

* The language posted at the end of this guide:

We are mandating e-ballots in all divisions of debate this year. It should mean a faster tournament for all, and for the judges, less schlepping around delivering paper ballots back to tab. The following is everything the coaches and judges need to know.

Coaches: If your judges have not already done so, have them create an account on tabroom.com. Do this before coming to the tournament. They simply click on “sign up” at the top of the tabroom.com home page and follow the instructions. Both judges and students should have unique accounts in their own names. (Judges who have accounts in their coach’s name, which some do occasionally, are unable to access their ballots.) NOTE: You might want to link to this doc for complete instructions: <http://www.debatecoaches.org/s/e-ballots.pdf>

All judges should come prepared with electronic devices capable of entering results. There is wifi throughout the campus, and any device—smartphone, tablet, computer, Chromebook—will do. Make sure that it is charged, and that it works. E-balloting does not necessarily mean that you need to bring a computer to rounds for flowing or whatnot; the device you decide to use in rounds, and how you adjudicate a round, is up to you. But you do need a device to enter results. And keep in mind that even if the wifi were to go to hell in a handbasket, you can still always use your phone to enter results, and write up your ballots later when the wifi comes back.

The tournament will not be able to accommodate any paper ballots in the debate events. Judges who are unprepared to judge electronically will be taken out of the tournament, and their schools fined the full missing-judge fee. [Lately we’ve been setting the missing judge fee as twice the cost of hired judges to disabuse people of the idea that if they didn’t get a hire they can show up anyhow and pay literally the same fee, thus stealing the judges you need to run the tournament effectively.]

One half hour before the scheduled start of a round, pairings and assignments will be released, and all participants will be notified of where to go. You will have plenty of time to get there, especially if you use the official school map at xxxxx. [We strongly suggest you post a map on your invitation website page.] Judges who have not gotten an assignment shall remain on call in case an assigned judge does not show up. For those in rounds, there will also be a 10-minute warning and a start-now message.

We will be enforcing strict rules on making the rounds happen. Everyone is expected to be in the rooms and starting the rounds at the posted times. Judges who are not in their rooms within five minutes of the posted times will be replaced and fined. Students who are not in their rooms within five minutes of the posted times will forfeit. If both students are in the room and there is no judge five minutes after the posted time, students must report missing the judge to tab for replacement. Failure to do so will result in double forfeits.

Judges: The only way we can measure what’s happening is by your correct use of the start-round button. Please do not hit the start button until you and both of your teams are in the room and, literally, starting the round. If you press the button willy-nilly before the round starts, it jeopardizes the scheduling of the rounds. If you don’t press the button as the round is starting, we will assume that you are a no-show, and replace and fine you.

The phone number(s) for tab are xxxxxx. If there are any problems, call or text us.

What constitutes a problem:

- 1. No judge in room five minutes after start time*
- 2. All competitors not in room five minutes after start time*
- 3. Other, as it relates to reasons there's not a debate going on*

By the same token, if rounds do not start on time, we will be calling you. We have found that the phone is a marvelous device for talking to people who are some distance away from us—who knew?—like judges who haven't pressed start, or coaches of judges who have gone missing.

*Judges must enter results immediately when the round concludes. (We'll call you if you keep us waiting.) **The decision must come before the critique.** We ask judges to limit oral critiques as much as possible so that we can turn the rooms around in a timely manner. Results will be posted on tabroom as soon as they are all in after each round, and, of course, you can write critiques on your e-ballots, which means that not only will the debaters receive them, but so will their coaches. In fact, judges can add to or modify their comments on e-ballots until the "end of tournament" results are published, which means they can add to them during whatever free time that might arise (although, of course, they cannot change decisions or points).*

Thank you. For those of you new to e-ballots, and that may be a lot of PF judges, we realize that all of this sounds rather fierce, to say the least, but for e-ballots to work with this many people in this many buildings requires everyone to be on the same page. The goal is a fair, on-time tournament. Let's make it so!